10-POINT FRAMEWORK

for Pandemic Influenza Business Contingency Planning

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1 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND STRUCTURE

Issues to Consider

- Planning for pandemic influenza should draw from existing crisis management/emergency plans and should be aligned with those plans.
- A chain-of-command structure will be extremely important to ongoing operations.
- Thresholds for when to implement certain emergency measures should be included in emergency planning.
- The emergency plan should be reviewed periodically, updated as needed, and well understood by essential personnel.
- The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a possible template for incident management.

Sample Planning Activities

- Develop an Emergency Operations Team for pandemic response (include 3-deep redundancy for each team member). List the titles and roles of key people, and outline their functions.
- Develop an Emergency Operations Plan that outlines chain of command and other key business-continuity activities. Consider developing annexes to the plan that deal with specific issues in each of the key functional areas outlined below.
- Plans should incorporate "trigger points" and thresholds for implementing various activities.
- Emergency management plans should be tested and exercised, then revised as needed.

2 EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Issues to Consider

- Employee shortages are extremely likely. At any given point, 25% to 50% of the workforce may be out (owing to illness, need to care for ill family members, fear of contagion, inadequate transportation to work, etc).
- Employers should assume that vaccine will not be available during the initial waves of a pandemic, owing to lag times in vaccine development and production. Vaccine will likely initially be distributed only through the public sector.
- Needs for personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees should be identified ahead of time.
- PPE supplies likely will be in short supply during a pandemic.
- Businesses need to determine whether or not they will obtain stockpiles of PPE supplies or antiviral agents.
- Human Resources (HR) systems are likely to be extremely stressed by employee health and safety issues.
- Healthcare systems will be stressed, and employees may not have access to basic medical care, including hospital care.
- Businesses with employees in cities that rely on public transportation may be particularly challenged if public transportation systems are curtailed (further limiting workforce availability).
- Partnerships with the public sector will be important.

Sample Planning Activities

- Consider the concept of evacuating top executives and housing them in "safe havens," where they can be protected.
- Develop procedures for monitoring and managing employee health at the work site (this should include contingency plans for workers becoming ill or dying at work).
- Educate employees to NOT come in to work if they have respiratory symptoms during times of pandemic activity in their areas.
- Develop an employee database to track employee absences, survival, and deaths.
- Decide on criteria for "immunity" (for example, recent pandemic influenza illness with recovery) and whether different policies will apply to presumably immune employees.
- Identify appropriate PPE for personnel.
- Obtain stockpiles of PPE as needed.
- Develop policies around availability, stockpiling, use, and distribution of antiviral agents.
- Develop policies and procedures to minimize workplace exposures for employees, customers, and suppliers (including measures to increase social distancing).
- Develop employee health education programs that address symptoms of influenza, steps to prevent transmission, respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, etc.
- Develop a plan for addressing employees' additional sustained health-related costs.
- Develop workforce "resilience" programs (such as providing workforce psychosocial support services).
- Examine HR policies and determine if changes will be needed during a pandemic (such as sick leave, family leave, vacation leave, emergency employee assistance, shift limits, short-term disability, constraining employee travel or movement).
- Begin working with employee assistance programs (EAPs) to address pandemic-related issues.
- Develop travel-related policies for workers.
- Examine employee insurance policy issues.
- Examine whether or not housing will need to be secured for certain employees during peak periods of influenza activity.
- Develop plans for workplace safety mitigation as needed.
- In some business sectors, employers may need to develop policies for prioritization of limited vaccine supplies.
- For employees who are in the field, plans need to be in place for employee recall or instructions for them to stay in place.
- Determine whether or not your company will need to provide secure transport of employees (for example, out of affected areas or countries or to and from work sites).

3 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Issues to Consider

- Managing expectations is a key aspect of communication plans.
- Businesses will need to determine sources of accurate and current information.
- Communication plans need to take into consideration the possibility that workforce operations will be disrupted and decentralized.
- Traditional mechanisms of communication may not be available.
- Communication plans should include mechanisms for communicating with the Board of Directors and shareholders or other key stakeholders, as appropriate.
- Communiqués should be sent out proactively according to predetermined standardized time frames, which can aid in managing expectations.

Sample Planning Activities

- Consider instituting employee education and communications about pandemic influenza immediately so that employees are familiar with the issue.
- Direct employees to credible sources (such as the CDC and WHO Web sites).
- Develop an Emergency Communications Plan that is centralized and relies on one key source in the organization.
- Develop notification procedures to ensure that accurate and timely information is distributed across the organization.
- Make messages simple, and address language and cultural barriers as needed.
- Consider development of mechanisms (such as call centers, hotlines, portals, e-mail systems, instant messaging, video conferencing, intranets) to provide information to employees.

4 SECURITY

Issues to Consider

- Shortages in critical supplies will necessitate security to protect critical assets.
- Social disruption may occur, increasing the likelihood of public panic and disorder.
- Security policies will need to consider alternative work sites.
- The available workforce of security guards will be reduced because of the pandemic.
- Some facilities may need to be vacated for periods of time; security for these sites may be necessary.

Sample Planning Activities

- Identify sites where additional security will be needed, and take appropriate steps to enhance security (for critical supplies, warehouses, equipment, work sites, etc).
- Develop security plans for workers operating at alternative work sites (including security of computer systems, databases, etc).
- Security plans should consider the impact of reduced staffing (in retail stores, for example), and redundancy should be built in to staffing as much as possible.
- Plans should consider work site or retail proximity to places where medical supplies, vaccines, or other healthcare resources are being stored or distributed.
- If security is contracted out, contact vendors and find out what types of contingency plans they may have in place.
- Consider whether or not the premises or closed facilities will need to be secured.

5 INFORMATION SYSTEMS, TECHNOLOGY, AND DATABASES

Issues to Consider

- Normal systems may not be operational owing to power shortages or lack of personnel support.
- Secure remote-access systems may be critical to continuation of business operations during a pandemic.
- If the workforce is international, information technology (IT) infrastructure may be limited in some countries, and steps to address this issue will be needed.
- The government may ration telephone lines during a crisis.

Sample Planning Activities

- Ensure that redundancy is built in to all databases and that systems are backed up appropriately.
- Identify critical information systems and ensure that data from such systems can be retrieved as needed.
- Determine which IT tasks run automatically and which require a person, and ensure redundancy at that position.
- Determine "trigger points" or thresholds for when to freeze IT systems and prohibit any system changes.
- Consider development of system-wide Internet portals with secure remote access.
- If many workers will be working remotely via a virtual private network (VPN), ensure that the VPN is designed to manage anticipated needs.
- Identify other IT needs (such as broadband availability, bandwidth capacity, DSL capacity, local IT infrastructure) for workers who are working from home or from other remote work sites. Keep in mind that existing vendors may become overwhelmed and unable to meet demands.

6 SUPPLY CHAINS AND CRITICAL INPUTS AND OUTPUTS

Issues to Consider

- Because most supply chains operate on a just-in-time model, many core items and critical inputs will not be available.
- Shipping of goods and materials may be severely disrupted, particularly from overseas.
- Shortages of dock workers or truckers will contribute to the disruption of the flow of goods.
- Many companies have outsourced parts of their operation (either locally or internationally), and these services may be disrupted during a pandemic.
- Port authority issues/border closings may be important considerations in movement of goods and materials.

Sample Planning Activities

- Identify core items and critical inputs.
- Categorize critical inputs as "vulnerable" (ie, potentially not available during a pandemic) or "not vulnerable" (ie, likely to be available).
- Contact key suppliers or contractors and find out what types of contingency plans they may have in place.
- Develop contingency plans for unavailability of supplies and inputs.
- Identify alternative supply chains if possible (for example, consider moving from international suppliers to local suppliers).
- Create emergency purchase orders ahead of time that can be executed when needed.
- Negotiate with vendors ahead of time as much as possible.
- Provide a prioritized list of key customers who will receive product by type and channel (and develop plans for scaling back production to these customers).

7 PUBLIC AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Issues to Consider

- Communications to the public need to be accurate and timely and should be based on reliable sources of information. Strategies should be in place to rapidly disseminate new information.
- A key consideration for communicating with the public involves "managing expectations," and this should be considered as messages are developed.
- Public relations plans also should take into consideration the role of the business in community support.
- Efforts should be made to ensure "consistency of the message" to the public across business sectors and government.

Sample Planning Activities

- Develop plans for providing ongoing information to the public.
- Consider implementing a quality assurance process to ensure accuracy and timeliness of communiqués.
- Identify media strategies and coordinate with other organizations as necessary.
- Consider pre-drafting press releases for different phases of the pandemic.
- Identify key spokespersons.
- Consider the role of the business in community support.

8 LEGAL ISSUES

Issues to Consider

- Legal issues will depend to a large degree on the specific business sector.
- Businesses will be expected to rapidly comply with any new local, state, federal, and international mandates, laws, or regulations.
- Liability and legal implications will need to be addressed around a range of new practices, such as tracking and monitoring employees' health and changing work environments to work-at-home or alternate work sites.
- Businesses will need to explore how to manage various contract obligations (such as supply chain or inventory) in the setting of reduced availability of materials. Contract liability issues need to be addressed.
- Employee and labor union contracts may need to be amended.
- Sarbanes-Oxley compliance in the face of a pandemic will need to be considered.
- Companies with offices in other countries will need to consider the local laws and policies.

Sample Planning Activities

- Identify the legal issues that could affect operation of your organization during a pandemic.
- Consider how your organization might be involved in liability issues that could result from a pandemic and what steps can be taken to minimize liability.
- Ensure that redundancy exists in your legal support system.
- Determine how compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley disclosures will be met during a pandemic. (The Sarbanes-Oxley Act, also called the Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act, was passed in 2002 in response to accounting scandals in prominent US companies.)

9 GOVERNMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Issues to Consider

- Government agencies have broad emergency powers that could be enacted under state or city Declarations of Emergency (such as commandeering various assets in the community).
- Businesses need to be aware of how such emergency powers may affect their operations.
- Regulatory reporting may change during a pandemic; this may require process re-engineering.
- Possible government interventions to consider include quarantine, isolation, travel restrictions, and closing of borders for some countries.

Sample Planning Activities

- Identify key contacts within government and begin building relationships as needed.
- Consider the impact that government interventions related to a pandemic may have on business operations, and plan accordingly.

10 BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Issues to Consider

- The impact of a pandemic could last for months, and operational plans need to take this fact into consideration.
- The leadership of the organization may be seriously disrupted by illness or death during a pandemic.
- Operations may need to be consolidated, diversified, or closed, depending on specific situations.

Sample Planning Activities

- Identify essential and nonessential operational functions and prioritize them.
- Identify personnel skill sets needed for essential functions.
- Succession planning for key executives should be considered ahead of time.
- Develop cross-training programs (such as computer-based training) to ensure adequate staffing of essential functions; consider strategies such as developing "job sheets" that outline key activities by position.
- Anticipate staffing shortages and develop plans to reallocate employees as needed.
- Anticipate changes in operations (such as retail store hours or closures, plant closures, redistribution of employees).
- Anticipate changes in consumer/customer/client practices, needs, buying patterns, access to services, etc, and develop contingency plans.
- Consider the impact of disruption in social systems or services on your organization (for example, transportation, power, food, sanitation).
- Determine alternate strategies for sales (such as online shopping) as appropriate.
- Develop a plan to shift workers to home offices or other sites (such as "satellite offices") that minimize exposure risks, address potential fuel shortages, and curtail dependence on public transportation.
- Consider whether alternative workforces could be deployed and trained for your organization.
- If appropriate, ensure that knowledge and skills are distributed geographically in case one area is particularly hard hit.
- Consider shifting product distribution patterns to more local and regional markets as appropriate.
- Determine the potential impact of a pandemic on business financials.
- Develop a business recovery plan.

This document was produced by CIDRAP staff and reviewed by 19 business professionals representing a wide spectrum of industry sectors and relevant job functions.